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RWU and Breakthrough Providence Partner to Launch a College Preparatory Academy for Underserved Providence High School Students

Jill Rodrigues

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. – With numerous barriers and challenges preventing low-income and minoritized students from accessing higher education, it is clear that more programs and resources are needed to redress the systemic inequities in order to give all students the opportunity to be fully prepared to succeed and pursue all possible pathways to a college education.

Roger Williams University (RWU) and [Breakthrough Providence](#) (BTP) are teaming up to address this core challenge to student success. Through a college preparatory academy geared toward ninth- and 10th-grade high school students, RWU and BTP are offering early outreach to help underserved students navigate barriers to their pathway to college. This fall, these partners will launch Breakthrough Providence – College Bound Program at Roger Williams University, in which RWU faculty, enrollment staff and students will deliver college preparation, career exploration and peer mentoring to Providence high school students. This initiative builds upon RWU's longstanding efforts to develop inclusive educational opportunities and expand college access to underserved students and is integral to the mission of the university's Equity Action Plan.

“Roger Williams University is thrilled to be the first university to partner with Breakthrough Providence on this important initiative that will help break down the systemic barriers to access and achievement in higher education, expanding the opportunity to receive a life-transforming education among all members of our local community,” said RWU President Ioannis Miaoulis. “As part of our mission and core values to advance educational equity for all students, we are committed to developing pathways to college for underserved students and for RWU to serve as a pipeline to those who may be interested in pursuing a full-time undergraduate program on our Bristol campus or chart their own innovative, self-paced path through University College at our Providence campus.”

Through academic enrichment and leadership programs geared toward middle school and high school students, Breakthrough Providence has seen 100 percent of their program participants graduate high school. With the launch of the Breakthrough Providence – College Bound Program at Roger Williams University, the organization and university aim to increase higher education opportunities for academically motivated students and get them to college ready to succeed.

“When selecting our university partnership for College Bound, Roger Williams University was our unanimous choice due to their outstanding proposal for a social justice-informed approach to college preparation and peer mentoring,” said Breakthrough Providence Executive Director Drine Paul. “Also, the partnership with RWU will leverage their resources for college access and admissions and enable a strong college connection for our young program participants, many of whom are likely to be the first in their families to go to college. We want to ensure they have early exposure of what it is like to go to college and help navigating the admissions process.”

The college preparatory academy will open in September to Providence students, delivered on the weekends on RWU’s Bristol and Providence campuses, both remotely and in person. As an extension of their already notable Middle School Program that has served Providence youth for 30 years, Breakthrough Providence student alums are able to matriculate into this program to receive continued support in academics and leadership support. The first cohort may be as large as 20 students. As part of the mission of addressing college access issues, the program is being offered free to qualifying students.

RWU faculty members and students will collaborate with Breakthrough Providence to lead the yearlong program, which includes lessons on college readiness and career path exploration. In addition, the high school students will get to explore a college campus and meet with RWU's admissions and financial aid teams to learn more about the college search, admissions and financial aid process. College Bound participants will also get priority consideration for RWU's Intercultural Leadership Ambassador Program, which includes a scholarship of over \$30,000 per year for four years and includes mentorship, academic support and leadership development opportunities for first-generation and underserved students.

An intentional part of the program design will be the role of Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and first-generation RWU students serving as mentors for high school students in the College Bound program for the entire year. To support them in that work, the RWU students will take a year-long, six credit course, titled "Racial Justice in the Classroom: Anti-Racist Mentoring of Underserved High School Students," that explores and supports the voices, experiences and well-being of BIPOC and first-generation college students at RWU, as they participate in the restorative work of anti-racist

mentoring. The course will be a space of mutual learning as well as a space of uplift and nourishment that centers BIPOC and first-generation college students. It is being taught by RWU Associate Professor of Cultural Studies Laura D'Amore and Associate Professor of Communication and Media Studies Kamille Gentles-Peart, who co-founded the Diversity and Inclusion Fellows program at RWU and are the faculty co-leaders of the College Bound Program.

“The course will enable BIPOC and first-generation RWU students to deliver anti-racist advising and mentoring practices that promote racial justice, and to be supported as they support their College Bound youth mentees to navigate systemic barriers to access and achievement in education and society,” said D'Amore. “This will be an incredible engaged learning opportunity for RWU students and an impactful and transformative experience for underserved students in Providence.”

This program prioritizes the applications of BIPOC and first-generation students at RWU. For students who are interested in serving in a future leadership role in the College Bound program, contact Professor D'Amore at ldamore@rwu.edu to learn more about the course requirements and next year's recruitment timeline. For information about the Breakthrough

Providence – College Bound Program at Roger Williams University, contact Jeronima Nix at nnix@breakthroughprovidence.org.